

Watch out for ads that offer dubious bargains in coins

By Roger Boye

For sale: "Beautifully circulated" silver half dollars with the "walking Liberty" design at the unheard of low price of \$9.95 each, plus \$1.50 for shipping.

A bargain? Probably not, say the experts, who warn novices to be wary of large advertisements touting the investment potential of collectible coins.

"Ask your local coin dealer about prices before jumping at the half-dollar offer," advises Kenneth Bressett in his Consumer Alert column in *The Numismatist*. Many "walking Liberty" halves that are worn from use—especially those made in the 1940s—are worth just their "silver value," which is about \$2.50 per coin at current metal prices.

Newspaper advertisements from mail-order coin companies often proliferate in the gift-buying season. Some ads offer genuine bargains from ethical companies, but others can mislead.

For example, a recent advertisement described a new coin from the Marshall Islands as being about the same diameter as a silver dollar. But the ad failed to say the item was made of copper and nickel—not silver.

"The recent space shuttle flight [depicted on the Marshall Islands piece] has spawned a new \$5 commemorative coin, but those who buy it as an investment could be taken for a ride," according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Bressett—one of the hobby's most respected writers—has examined scores of deceptive promotions over the years, including one he recently called "so blatantly false that [I] can only wonder why the advertiser would waste his money and time trying to get anyone to respond."

Under the headline "Double Your Money," the ad claimed that investors have made more than 600 percent profit in less than five years, and that Morgan silver dollars are one of today's hottest rare-coin investments.

In fact, some circulated Morgans are selling for about \$10 each, roughly half of their price early this decade during the great silver-market boom.

"Let's hope that everyone will think twice before anticipating huge returns from investments with this company," Bressett wrote in *The Numismatist*. "Even under the best of conditions, this type of come-on looks risky."